

*An inner step toward God. Writings and teachings on prayer* by Father Alexander Men. Edited by April French, translated by Christa Belyaeva. Pp. 192. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2014. £17.99 (paper). 978 1 61261 238 6  
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Fr Alexander Men was a remarkable priest in Moscow during the last decades of Communism. He was controversial, not just with the Communist authorities owing to his active promotion of Christianity in the three parishes that he served, and his facility for evading the prohibitions on promoting Christianity by preaching at all services, including funerals, but also with other Orthodox, who suspected him of departing from tradition – such suspicions were even found among Orthodox in the comfortable West. He was murdered by an axe-blow to the head on his way to church on the morning of 9 September 1990. He was an extraordinary priest in many ways: not just for the boldness with which he built up his Christian communities, and his openness to ecumenism, but for his thirst to understand Christianity in the context of world religions, composing a seven-volume work, *In search of the way, the truth, and the life* (volumes appearing between 1968 and 1983, originally published abroad as ‘tamizdat’). He was a self-made scholar, having been prevented from taking his examinations in biology when it was discovered that he was a churchgoer; his theological learning was based on following the reading lists of the Spiritual Academy, and wide, random reading. This volume contains his *Practical guide to prayer*, only published after his death, though it circulated in unpublished form before then. It is truly practical – straightforward and down-to-earth; it is also utterly traditional, though presented in a lively way, aware of the problems of praying in the modern world.

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*Faithful narratives. Historians, religion, and the challenge of objectivity.* Edited by Andrea Sterk and Nina Caputo. Pp. ix + 278. Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 2014. \$79.95 (paper). 978 0 8014 5182 9; 978 0 8014 7857 4  
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Historians of religion in the twenty-first century work in a social and intellectual context that is vastly different from that of those who wrote ‘church history’ even a generation ago. Although religion is now seen to be central to many areas of world conflict and global politics, it is still common for historians to see religion as subordinate and peripheral to the ‘real’ forces that shape society and to distrust the motives of historians who write with an openly declared religious commitment. For their part, historians who seek to demonstrate that religious faith and religious texts can be a causative force, and that religion needs to be taken seriously in its own right, have to contend with new questions, new kinds of religious evidence, challenges to once trusted evidence, and the dissolution of received categories, such as orthodoxy/heresy and religion/secularisation, which once seemed quite clear. They are also confronted by religious believers who are alarmed by the critical study of religious traditions and sacred texts which they have been taught to regard as absolute truth. This work comprises essays by twelve prominent historians of religion who teach in north American universities on the significance of religion in the making and writing of history. Contributors